

## When Earthquakes Happen

Luke 4: 14-21

January 24, 2010

### Gospel Lesson

<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup> He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. <sup>16</sup> When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

<sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” <sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

This is the Gospel of our Lord.  
Praise to you, O Christ.

How many of you have been following the news about the about the recent earthquake in Haiti? Show hands? We’ve seen and heard vivid pictures of this devastated area for over a week now. For example, CNN showed Dr. Sanjay Gupta treating a small two week old baby for a head injury. We watched some amazing rescues by international teams of relief workers who struggled side by side to save a ten year old girl, an 84 year old woman, and just yesterday a young man from the rubble.

Teams of people have set up temporary shelters, hospitals and food stations. Just last Friday evening George Clooney hosted a huge fund raiser that included over one hundred stars who came to show their care and support. How many millions of dollars have been raised so far?

Have you noticed a universal sense of urgency? People of all walks of life are mobilizing quickly to stave off further deaths through untreated wounds, lack of water and food. The spirit to do something immediately continues to grow in response to this earthquake. There is a spirit that unites people into a network of care. Right before our eyes we find a safety net being formed for the well-being of others.

I believe that we are seeing the Spirit of Christ at work.

The Holy Spirit compelled and propelled Jesus into his mission to respond to the devastation in people’s lives. When Jesus spoke the words of Isaiah in his hometown synagogue, we can catch that same sense of urgency. His eyes and heart were open to all in need. The Spirit defined his mission:

- Give release and healing to those held captive, to those who were suffering and to those who had a disease of any kind.

- Offer freedom from poverty, but also freedom from the sins of self centeredness and complacent comfort.

The Spirit moves through Him to give sight to the blind, those who are blind physically but also to those who are blind to the ways of God in this world, and to the needs of others.

In this reading Jesus proclaimed that God is at work in the here and now. On this day the scripture is fulfilled. The day of the Lord is at hand.

And this day we can look around and see how others are responding to the many earthquakes that are around. There is the physical, much publicized earthquake in Haiti. But there are also those silent, almost unnoticed earthquakes which shake up people's lives. Such earthquakes as a job loss, an illness, a sudden change of plans, or a family breaking up, can be as earth shattering to a soul as the earthquake in Haiti has been to many bodies. How many quiet earthquakes do we have all around us?

Our Stephen Ministers have been trained to respond to these times of crisis or change in everyday lives. They are willing and able to stand alongside of anyone who may be hospitalized, terminally ill and their families, someone grieving a death or serious loss, the homebound, those with a job crisis, anyone needing the support of a Christian friend.

This ministry of lay persons has been available for a few years now for this church, there is still much to share. This is a safety net for the many kinds of private earthquakes that can cause a spiritual crisis that can be as devastating as a physical calamity.

At one time or another we need a Stephen Minister, or someone like that, to walk with us, to help dig us out of whatever mess life presents.

And at other times, God wants us to be those Christian caregivers. There are certain skills we can develop to help us become prayerful listeners, learning the art of letting go and letting God be in charge and simply being there as a caring presence.

If God is tapping you on the shoulder today, either to talk with a Stephen Minister or to receive training as one, please contact the co-leaders or our Stephen Ministry.

I'd like to share a story about this kind of Christian spirit at work in our everyday world today. You may have also read it recently in our devotional guide, "The Upper Room." A man was backing out of the parking lot at a hospital. Suddenly another car rammed his wonderful, favorite sports car of which he was quite proud. He got out to confront the other driver. But instead of reacting with a spirit of anger that could have ripped the woman apart, this man's response was in the spirit of Christ. He asked her if she was alright. She started to weep. She said that she had just been diagnosed with a form of cancer and didn't know how this would affect her family. His eyes were opened to her distress. They prayed together as well as took care of the necessary exchange of insurance information. Later he wrote how God restores our own sight to move us out of our own self concerns to see the concerns of others.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" read Jesus. That Holy Spirit guided his earthly ministry. Jesus brought joy to the weary, hope to the distressed, courage to the imprisoned, new vision to the discouraged, challenge to the complacent, release from demonic, self destructive ways, forgiveness and new life, and abundant, eternal life to all who turned to him in faith.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, the Church. May this same Spirit that inspired Christ so move mightily among us this day. Knit us together as a safety net to help when any kind of earthquake happens. May this same Spirit unite us as the Body of Christ to continue to bring Christ's hope and faith to a hungry and hurting world.

Thanks be to God in whom we live and move and have our being. Amen.